R8780-1 A 10/21/82

PRRC emerging trends

Oct. 82

© Published by the Princeton Religion Research Center Vol. 4, No. 8

1348 'Opinion Leaders' Assess State of Religion in U.S.

Princeton, N.J. – A nationwide survey of 1348 opinion leaders, representing the sciences, business, the arts, and many other fields, shows organized religion receiving poor marks for providing adequate answers to the problems of family life and to the moral problems and needs of the individual. This elite group gives only fair marks to the Church for dealing with man's spiritual needs.

By a 53% to 24% margin, these leading citizens say organized religion is not giving adequate answers to the problems of family life, and by a proportion of 48% to 36%, that the Church is not offering adequate answers to the moral problems and needs of the individual.

When it comes to man's spiritual needs, the opinion leaders are closely divided in their views, with 35% saying organized religion is providing adequate answers and 41% holding the opposite view.

While lukewarm in their appraisal of the effectiveness of churches, the leading citizens, by a 3-to-2 ratio, think religion in the future will become *more* rather than *less* important for people in this country.

Those who think religion will become more important in the future argue that there is: (1) growing disenchantment with materialism among the populace, (2) an increasing realization that life is meaningless without faith in a higher power, that (3) people are searching with a new intensity for the meaning of life, and that (4) without religion there would be social chaos.

A 57-year-old college dean from Alabama said, "Religion will gain in importance because there is 'a turning away from hedonism' and 'doing your own thing.'" In the same vein were comments made by a 62-year-old physician from Pennsylvania: "People have to learn that the 'me-first' attitude hurts themselves in the short and long run–religion will be more important in the years ahead." Still another survey respondent commented: "Secularism has become bankrupt."

Another opinion leader said, "Religion is needed to save our social order from the chaos of egocentric, relativistic humanism." Said another: "Religion is the glue that holds civilization together."

A retired corporation executive from Tennessee saw things this way: "Religion will become more important–the world is becoming increasingly unmanageable in human terms. Man's inability to cope will make him look to the heavens and the Scriptures."

Those who feel that religion will become *less* important offer these reasons: (1) religion no longer speaks to our times, and (2) organized religion actually exacerbates problems in our society.

One opinion leader commented: "Religion is no longer relevant in a harsh, crass, commercial world."

Another survey respondent had this to say: "More people will become disaffected with the hypocrisy of present-day organized religion."

To some extent, comments arise from a basically negative view of religion or organized religion. A clinical psychologist from Washington, D.C. said, "Religion tends to obfuscate thinking, reinforce prejudices, and justify discriminations and persecutions."

Some opinion leaders in the survey feel that religion will remain a force in our society, although perhaps in different form. One survey participant noted: "The types of religion may change, but religion is an integral part of the social fabric of American society."

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION IN LIVES OF OPINION LEADERS

The outlook of the 1348 opinion leaders surveyed can be expected to reflect, at least in some measure, their own religious perspective.

The survey reveals that six in 10 opinion leaders say religion is either "very" or "fairly" important in their lives, with 33% saying "very" and 25% "fairly." At the same time, however, 40% say religion is "not very important" in their lives, in sharp contrast to the answers given in national surveys of the general public.

ABOUT HALF BELIEVE IN PERSONAL GOD

Four in 10 (40%) of these leading citizens say they believe in a personal God (that is, a God who observes one's actions and judges people), while 34% believe in "some sort of spirit or life force." Another 6% fall into

the category of agnostics and indicate that they "don't really know what to think," while 14% can be considered atheists, indicating they "really don't think there is any sort of spirit, God, or life force."

These views contrast sharply with those of the general public, two in three of whom say they believe in a personal God.

Following are the questions and national results, showing comparisons with the general public:

Generally speaking, do you think that organized religion is giving adequate answers to:

– the moral problems and needs of the individual?

	Leaders	Public
Yes	36%	61%
No	48	26
No opinion	16	13
	100%	100%

– the problems of family life?

	Leaders	Public
Yes	24%	63%
No	53	24
No opinion	23	13
	100%	100%

– man's spiritual needs?

	Leaders	Public
Yes	35%	73%
No	41	14
No opinion	24	13
	100%	100%

Do you think that religion in the future will be more important, less important, or equally important for people in this country?

	Leaders	Public
More	33%	49%
Less	24	14
Equally	27	33
No opinion	16	4
	100%	100%

How important would you say religion is in your own life – very important, fairly important, or not very important?

	Leaders	Public
Very important	33%	56%
Fairly important	25	29
Not very important	40	14
No opinion	2	1
	100%	100%

Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?

	Leaders	Public
There is a personal God	40%	66%
There is some sort of spirit or life force	34	26
I don't really know what to think	6	5
I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God, or life force	14	1
No opinion	6	2
	100%	100%

REASONS FOR GROWING INTEREST IN SURVEY RESEARCH IN RELIGION

Interest in survey research in the field of religion has grown markedly in recent years in the United States. Among the key reasons are the following:

1. A growing awareness of the need to probe beneath the level of religious involvement to the bedrock of spiritual commitment. The most important statistic for churches is, in the last analysis, not the proportion who are members of churches, or who attend regularly – although these are vital "survival statistics" – but the proportion who could be classified as "highly spiritually committed" (the "truly devout," if you will).

2. A widespread concern of a practical nature that the decline in church members among many denominations is taking needed monies away from a given church. The average American gives about $250 per year to churches or other religious organizations.

3. A growing awareness that surveys represent a practical, efficient, and relatively inexpensive way to find out key information regarding a local church–for example, levels of religious belief, practice and knowledge, as well as stewardship potential.

4. A growing interest in evangelization – reaching out to the nominally religious or the non-religious.

5. A growing willingness on the part of churches to listen to the laity.

6. A growing willingness among various churches to tackle mutual problems together – in the spirit of ecumenism.

7. A growing awareness of the importance of examining religious beliefs and practices from a sociological perspective. Recent surveys give still further evidence of the importance of the religious dynamic in determining the overall attitudes and behavior of a populace. Indeed, the level of spiritual commitment appears to be a greater determinant in some areas than do the usual demographic characteristics of age, sex, level of education and so forth.

8. And then, of course, there are strictly religious reasons for a growing interest in survey research in the effort to shed light on the vital questions: *What do people believe about God?. . .How strongly do they hold these beliefs?. . .What differences do strongly-held beliefs make in terms of the life of the individual and in terms of society as a whole?. . .And, how is a strong faith developed?*

Public Conservative In Both Political, Religious Ideology

One of the more unusual aspects of the American political scene compared to that of other nations is the political conservatism of the American people – at least in their expressed political ideology.

For example, when asked where they place themselves on a political continuum from the far right to the far left, half again as many Americans position themselves to the right of center as to the left of center – 49% to 29%.

This same conservatism is reflected in Americans' expressed religious ideology. Again, half again as many describe themselves as ideologically to the religious right as left of center – and by virtually the same percentages – 48% to 30%.

In fact, in terms of those who are "very right-of-center," Americans are seen to be more conservative in their *religious* ideology than in their *political* ideology, with about half again as many Americans (17%) placing themselves on the extreme right religiously as on the political far right (12%).

IDEOLOGY

	Religious	Political
VERY RIGHT-OF-CENTER		
"Far right" and "substantially right"	17%	12%
SOMEWHAT RIGHT-OF-CENTER		
"Moderately right" and "slightly right"	31	37
CENTER (Volunteered)	9	10
SOMEWHAT LEFT-OF-CENTER		
"Moderately left" and "just slightly left"	21	23
VERY LEFT-OF-CENTER		
"Substantially left" and "far left"	9	6
NO OPINION	13	12
	100%	100%

Not surprisingly, most likely to identify themselves as right of center are those who claim to be evangelicals. In this group, more than four in 10 (42%) call themselves either far right or substantially right in terms of their religious ideology compared to only 17% of the nation as a whole and only 11% of the non-evangelical population.

Similarly, among those who state that religion is a very important part of their life, 26% place themselves in the two far-right categories as do 29% of those who claim they are living a very Christian life.

A total of 21% of Protestants identify themselves as either on the far right or substantially right of center compared to only 11% of Catholics.

THOSE MOST LIKELY TO BE TO THE LEFT

In contrast, groups most likely to identify themselves as left are those claiming to have no denominational preference (24%), to be leading a very unChristian life (27%), or for whom religion is a very unimportant part of their life (27%).

Although there is a close relationship between one's religious ideology and political ideology, being religiously conservative is more likely to be associated with political conservatism than religious liberalism is to be associated with political liberalism, as seen in the following table:

RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY	POLITICAL IDEOLOGY	
	Same	Different
Right	74%	26%
Left	66	34

Whereas whites' expressed religious philosophy is reflected quite clearly by their political philosophy, non-whites tend to be more to the left politically than they are in terms of their religious philosophy.

	Religion	Politics
WHITES		
Right	61%	65%
Left	39	35
NON-WHITES		
Right	61	53
Left	39	47

IDEOLOGY OF EVANGELICALS

Analysis of the data by respondents' level of religiosity reveals some interesting internal differences. However, as illustrated by the following table, evangelicals are a good deal more conservative in their religious ideology than they are in their political philosophy. Much of this difference can likely be accounted for by the large proportion of non-whites among the evangelical population.

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Public Found Evenly Divided In Debate On Evolution, Creationism

Debate over the origin of man is as alive today as it was at the time of the famous Scopes trial in 1925, with the public now about evenly divided between those who believe in the biblical account of creation and those who believe either in a strict interpretation of evolution or in an evolutionary process involving God.

In a recent Gallup survey 44% say they believe that God created man in his present form within the last 10,000 years, while 9% believe in the theory of evolution with God not involved, and 38% believe that man evolved from less advanced forms of life in an evolutionary process guided by God.

Evolution theorists believe the earth is billions of years old and that life forms developed gradually over millions of years. To support their views they cite evidence gathered during the last two centuries from geology, paleontology, molecular biology, and other scientific disciplines.

Those believing in creationism, on the other hand, generally hold that the earth and most life forms came into existence suddenly at some time within the last 10,000 years, resulting from an act of God.

Survey respondents were handed a card with three statements and asked this question:

Which of the statements on this card comes closest to describing your views about the origin and development of man?

Here are the national findings:

ORIGIN OF MAN

God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years.	44%
Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life. God had no part in this process.	9
Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process, including man's creation.	38
Other, don't know	9
	100%

Analysis of the findings brings the following to light:

* Persons with college training lean 2-to-1 in favor of evolution, but nearly one-third of the college segment believes the biblical account of creation. A difference, however, is found between college graduates and those who did not finish college. Graduates are more apt than non-graduates to believe in evolution, with or without God, and less apt to believe in biblical creationism.

* Adults under 30 years old are about as likely to believe in the biblical account of creation as are persons 30 to 49 years old. Those 50 and over, however, are more likely to do so.

* Southerners and Midwesterners are slightly more likely to accept creationism than are persons from other regions of the nation.

* The views of Protestants and Catholics differ rather sharply, with Protestants leaning toward the biblical account of creation, 49% to 43%, but Catholics siding with the evolutionary theories, 55% to 38%.

ORIGIN OF MAN

	Creationism %	Evolution with God %	Evolution without God %	Other, don't know %
NATIONAL	44	38	9	9
College (total)	30	50	15	5
Graduates	24	53	17	6
Incomplete	36	47	12	5
High school	49	35	7	9
Grade school	52	26	5	17
18-29 years	37	44	10	9
30-49 years	40	42	10	8
50 and over	53	30	7	10
East	40	38	9	13
Midwest	46	39	6	9
South	49	34	6	11
West	40	40	17	3
Protestants	49	36	7	8
Catholics	38	47	8	7

WHICH VERSION SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS?

A further survey question sought to determine public opinion about which account of the origin and development of man the public schools should teach:

Which of these do you think should be taught in the public schools?

The findings closely parallel the results of the earlier question, as follows:

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Volunteer Time Worth $64.5 Billion

More than 84 million Americans volunteer in a typical year for non-profit institutions, agencies and organizations, and the time they give is valued at $64.5 billion.

According to a study of volunteer activity conducted by the Gallup Organization, individuals give a total of 8.4 billion hours of their time to non-profit organizations.

And, the study concluded, those who do volunteer are more likely than non-volunteers to contribute to charitable organizations – with 91% of active volunteers making charitable gifts, compared with 66% of non-volunteers.

Among adults who volunteer, the largest portion (44%) first learned of the activity when they were asked by someone if they would volunteer. But having a family member or friend involved in the activity was the reason cited by 29% of the adults; and participation in a group or organization was the reason given by 31%.

Only one person in four sought out the volunteer activity on their own, while 6% said they became volunteeers because they had seen an ad or information about the activity in the media.

REASONS FOR INVOLVEMENT

When asked why they first became involved with volunteer activity, 45% of the adult volunteers said it was because they wanted to do something useful to help others; 29% said they thought they would enjoy the work and 11% said they wanted to learn and get job experience.

But those who volunteer apparently have an impact on bringing in new volunteers, since 23% of the adults said they volunteered because they knew someone who was already involved or would benefit from the activity.

The religion segment of the philanthropic community appears to draw more volunteers than any other, with 16% of adult males and 22% of adult females volunteering time in that area.

In the health field, 9% of the adult men and 15% of the adult women were active volunteers; while 8% of the men and 15% of the women volunteered in an education-related activity.

Four percent of the American men volunteered in the area of social welfare, while 5% of women also volunteered in that segment.

The pool of people who volunteer changes over time. The survey, which was sponsored by INDEPENDENT SECTOR, asked volunteers whether they do more, less or the same amount of volunteer work today as three years ago.

REASONS GIVEN FOR LESS INVOLVEMENT

Thirty-six percent said they did more, 30% less and 30% said they did the same. Four percent didn't answer.

When asked whether they were involved with any volunteer activity three years ago that they no longer do today, 21% said yes. Among adults who stopped doing volunteer activity in the past three years, the reasons most frequently given were that the volunteer became too busy to continue (33%); private or personal reasons (18%); the project they were involved with was completed (11%); and the volunteer had moved (12%).

The economy also played a role, with 10% saying they were no longer involved because they had a job, while 8% said they left because their friend or relative left.

UPSCALE GROUPS MOST LIKELY TO VOLUNTEER

The study showed that persons from upscale socio-economic groups are most likely to be volunteers. For example, 63% of individuals whose family income is $20,000 or over per year are volunteers compared to 44% of those with less family income. Similarly, 69% of persons who attended college are volunteers compared to only 43% of those whose formal education ended at the high school level or earlier.

Women, the study found, are more likely to volunteer than men, as are people under the age of 55, those who are employed, those who have children at home, and those who live in suburban or rural areas. Individuals from large households volunteer more than those from smaller families.

The dollar value of the volunteer time was computed by INDEPENDENT SECTOR on the basis of the number of persons involved in volunteer activity, the hours they volunteered each year and the dollar value of the hours by education level.

The total for adults was broken down as follows: adults with a grammar school education volunteer 206.3 million hours per year; high school-educated adults, 2.4 billion hours; and those with a college education, 5.2 billion hours. The number of hours was then multiplied by the average hourly wage for these three groups and equalled $62.2 billion.

Teenage volunteering provides the balance of the dollar value of volunteer time. A total of 7.7 million individuals between the ages of 14 and 17 volunteer, and this figure, multiplied by the average number of hours volunteered and the average wage for those individuals, totaled $2.3 billion.

Together, they equal $64.5 billion.

Public Conservative *continued*

EVANGELICALS

	Religion	Politics
Total right	69%	58%
Far right	42	20
Moderate right	27	38
Total left	13	21
Moderate left	10	17
Far left	3	4

In direct contrast are persons with no religious preference. As indicated by the table below, these persons are somewhat more "left" politically than the rest of the populace, and far more so in terms of their religious ideology.

NO RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

	Religion	Politics
Total right	19%	34%
Far right	4	9
Moderate right	15	25
Total left	44	37
Moderate left	20	26
Far left	24	11

Evolution, Creationism *continued*

WHICH VERSION SHOULD BE TAUGHT?

Creationism	38%
Evolution (with God)	33
Evolution (without God)	9
All three (volunteered)	4
None (volunteered)	4
Other, don't know	12
	100%

Most in the survey would like to see only their own view taught in the public schools. Those who believe in evolution without intervention by God are the least likely to insist that only their view be taught in the public schools, as seen in the following table:

TEACHING vs. OWN BELIEF

Among those who believe in:	Schools should teach only:
Creationism	78%
Evolution (with God)	74
Evolution (without God)	57

Earlier this year, a Federal judge ruled that an Arkansas law requiring schools to balance their teaching of evolution and creationism violates constitutional guarantees of separation between church and state.

U.S. District Judge William Overton held that what Arkansas called "creation science" met none of the essential characteristics of science. Instead, he wrote, it was an effort "to introduce the biblical version of creation into the public schools of the state."

EMERGING TRENDS is published monthly except July and August by the PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER. The Center, founded in 1977, is an inter-faith non-denominational research organization with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. The PRRC specializes in creative, actionable research, utilizing the worldwide attitudinal and behavioral facilities of Gallup International. The purpose of the PRRC is to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the U.S. and abroad and to explore ways this information can enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth. A one year subscription can be obtained for $30; inquire: **Publications Department, P.O. Box 310, 53 Bank Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540 (Telephone: 609/924-9600). PLEASE NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGE.**

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